

pursued him hitherward, and lo! we found his foot prints on the sand of the hill side, hard by."

"So please you, sir," the girl replied, and it might have been observed, that as she spoke to the Puritan there was a rusticity in her manner, and something of uncouthness in her speech, which had not marked the few words she uttered in addressing the cavalier. "So please you, sir, I know not any such—we be poor folks, and dwell here in the forest, and rarely go out into the country round. Father has cut wood here in Sherwood, these forty years or better; so that we know few of the gentry even by name." As she ceased speaking, she twitched her frock rather abruptly from Philip's hand, and running up to Mabel, who was still crying out as if her heart would break, leaned over her and raised her in her arms as if to still her sobbings; although it might have been her real object to conceal the crimson flush, which covered all her brow and face, and even neck, at her evasion of the soldier's question.

"That turn shall not avail thee, my fair mistress," the other answered rudely; "thy speech, too, savours somewhat of evasion, and consequent malignancy. I should not wonder hadst thou concealed the scoffing and blood-thirsty royalists—lucky for thee if thou hast not, I tell thee! But speak out truly, an thou would'st scape worse treatment. He was a tall slight youth of whom we question thee, with a blue scarf, and a black feather in his hat; his jerkin stained with blood, and his gait faint and faltering, I trow, for he was wounded. Hast thou seen such an one?"

"I have, sir," she replied steadily, and looking the Parliamentary full in the eye as she answered him.

"Thou hast, indeed? Marry, come up! a rare queen thou art—and why didst thou deny it but this moment? See that thou answer truly."

"If at all, sir, most surely I shall answer truth. Thou didst ask me of Desborough, and Hugh, with other titles which I know nought of; and how should I tell thee a man's name, I never saw but for a moment's space, and be-like never heard of?"

"Verily, I suspect thy speech; thou'rt over glib of tongue, young mistress, and somewhat pert, if modest; thou didst see him, thou knowest of, within the hour?"

"Within the hour!" she answered.

"How much within?" the soldier asked again, even more harshly than before.

"Truly we have no sundial here! the forest, nor any clock to tell us the time, surely; and I looked not to the hourglass, about a matter that concerned me nothing."

"Be not so sure, thou, that it will concern thee nothing. Now then, speak up, girl—where hast thou hidden him?"

"If you believe that I *have* hidden him, hadst best search for him; thou seest all the places wherein a man could be concealed."

"Marry! we will; but, meantime, from thine own lips I would condemn thee. Whither went this same youth?"

"Across the green, past the hut end."

"And whither then?"

"I saw him not any farther—but best search thou, good sir; 'tis plain thou dost misdoubt me; and of a surety, if I had hidden him from thee, I should not be so mad to tell thee where."

A stern frown and a fearful threat was all the answer she received to the last words; but turning to the soldiers, he bade those who carried fire-arms, scout the woods round about and search narrowly for his foot-prints! "for if he hath gone hence, as the jade saith, he will have left his track, I warrant me, of blood upon the greensward." Then, as they turned away to do his bidding, he ordered the others to search the hut thoroughly, the shed, and all the premises; himself, meanwhile, annoying the poor girl with every species of canting and rude interrogation. Half an hour had, perhaps, been consumed thus, when the scouts came in and asserted positively that the fugitive could not have left the spot, but must be concealed somewhere on the premises, since the blood gouts by which they had tracked him from the place where his horse fell, and which were visible across the green and in the passage between the woodpile and the cottage, were not to be found any where beyond; at the same moment the others, who had been employed in searching the house, returned with word that no one was to be found there.

"Then, as the Lord liveth," cried the officer, "we must make this lass find her tongue.—Here, Win-the-fight and Sin-despise, take ye this malapert boy, tie him to yon beech-tree, unbuckle your swordbelts, and give him the strappado, till this fair lady buys his release by her secret."

"No! no!" cried Constance; "oh, no! no! ye are men, born of women, made in the image of your Maker; no! no! ye will not, *cannot*, be so cruel!"

"Can we not, pretty one!" retorted the brutal roundhead; "verily, thou shalt see; speak